



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 106th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 145

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 1999

No. 50

House of Representatives

The House met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MICA).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
April 13, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHN L. MICA to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

WATER VISION 2000

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, since I was elected to Congress I have been focusing on the issue of livable communities and how we create better partnerships between the Federal Government and our citizens.

The livability movement is gaining dramatic momentum nationally as we watch officials from the Vice President, Mr. GORE, to local city and county commissioners champion goals for easing traffic congestion, promoting urban redevelopment and creating

more open and green spaces. We have seen fundamental changes in how the Federal Government is approaching transportation once we acknowledged that trying to pave our way out of congestion simply did not work, and just as the ISTEA legislation and the recently-enacted TEA-21 are promoting innovative approaches to transportation problems, I suggest that it is time for us to take a new approach to how we manage water resources. It would begin with a vision and a framework for improving the way the Federal Government approaches water resource problems and management based on the same flexibility that we have seen in transportation.

For too long, Mr. Speaker, we have treated our watersheds and rivers as machines, costing taxpayers billions of dollars as our communities continue to face increased risks from flood, decreasing numbers of fish and growing health risks caused by polluted rivers and streams. Forty percent of our Nation's waterways fail to meet drinking, recreation or fish habitat needs, and that number sadly is growing. Some urban streams and creeks and rivers are so degraded, people consider them dead and beyond recovery.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I joined with the America's Rivers program to announce America's most endangered rivers of 1999, a list of 10 such threatened waterways and what we can do about it. Well, Congress can help right now, and I suggest that we approach water issues in this session with what I would term Water Vision 2000.

It would, first of all, suggest that the Federal Government deal fundamentally with watersheds. We must think more broadly and comprehensively about the missions and how they can work with local communities throughout the entire watershed cycle.

Second, we must focus on increased Federal flexibility. We need more coordination and responsiveness from

Federal agencies so local communities can be creative in how they meet their water challenges. In this way we can indeed make sure that we are spending each dollar two or three times over in terms of total benefit, and citizen involvement must be part of the solution and not simply an afterthought of the decision-making process.

We have been using such an approach in Oregon. Last November we brought together over 300 people to deal with a summit on the needs of the Johnson Creek watershed, 54 square miles, to consider 45 separate plans that exist to deal with land use and regulatory issues in this area. It was a beginning for our efforts to deal more comprehensively and creatively together from the Federal level down to the local area.

I have suggested in this Congress three additional legislative proposals. I have already discussed on this floor approaches to the Federal flood control program. I hope ultimately we will have municipal watershed management on Federal lands; and I hope that people will join with me this week in dealing with reforms to the National Flood Insurance Program. High-risk properties for flood insurance right now make up only 2 percent of all the national flood properties, but they claim 40 percent of all Federal flood insurance pay-outs. Over the last 18 years, repetitive losses from these properties have cost the taxpayers over \$2.5 billion.

My legislation would deny national Federal flood insurance coverage to people who file two or more claims that total more than the value of their property. It would suggest that people who refuse to use Federal money to take the precaution of flood-proofing their homes or relocating out of harm's way would no longer be entitled to continuous Federal payment. Now is the time that we in this Congress ought to dedicate our efforts at every turn to make sure that the numerous local and

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

H1869

Federal water agencies are working comprehensively in the watershed, Mr. Speaker.

The next great advance in livability, if my colleagues will pardon the expression, is to be found on the waterfront, and I call on my colleagues to join me in this Congress in a comprehensive approach to a new vision of water resources.

SPECIFICS OF THE REPUBLICAN AGENDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I thought I would take a few minutes to kind of report on what the last couple weeks were like when I was back home spending time with my constituents during the district work period, conducting 15 town meetings, and I wanted to report today on really the response to the Republican agenda of good schools and low taxes and a secure retirement for all Americans.

I have the privilege of representing a very, very diverse district, the south side of Chicago in the south suburbs of Cook and Will Counties as well as a lot of rural and bedroom communities, and one always listens for the common concerns when they represent a diverse district of cities, suburbs and country.

During the last two weeks I got a pretty good response. People were very supportive of the Republican agenda of strengthening our local schools, of lowering the tax burden for the middle class, of making for a secure retirement for all Americans by strengthening Medicare and Social Security.

I would like to take a few minutes just to talk about some of those specifics of our Republican agenda, and of course let me begin with the Republican efforts to strengthen Social Security and to strengthen Medicare for the next three generations.

Mr. Speaker, I am often asked a common question over the last several years that I have had the privilege of being in the Congress, and that question is: When are you politicians in Washington going to stop raiding the Social Security Trust Fund? I was pleased to tell my constituents that this is the year we are going to do that. This is the year we are going to wall off the Social Security Trust fund and say, "Hands off," and my constituents frankly were pretty shocked when they learned that the Clinton-Gore budget actually raids the Social Security trust fund by \$351 billion.

I think it is important to note that when we compare Republican efforts to wall off the Social Security Trust Fund, which means 100 percent of Social Security according to this chart for Social Security versus the Clinton-Gore proposal for 62 percent of the Social Security Trust Fund going to Social Security and the other 38 percent

being spent on other things, that is what this means. The President wants to spend 38 percent of Social Security on new government programs. Republicans, of course, want to wall off the Social Security Trust Fund, essentially putting trust back in the trust fund with 100 percent of Social Security for Social Security, and that is a big victory.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to note that the Republican budget sets aside almost \$400 billion more than the Clinton-Gore budget for Medicare and Social Security.

Now our second priority in our agenda, of course, is lower taxes for the middle class, and I am one who believes that when the tax burden for the average family in Illinois is about 40 percent of their income going to local, State and Federal Government for taxes, that that tax burden is too high and we need to lower the tax burden, particularly for the middle class. And when we talk about the tax burden, I find that constituents, whether it is at the union hall or the VFW or the local Chamber of Commerce, they tell me that the Tax Code is too complicated, requires too much paperwork, and the majority of people have to hire someone else to fill out the tax forms. And I also point out that the tax burden is really unfair.

As we work this year to lower the tax burden, I believe that our top priority should be to simplify the Tax Code, to address the unfairness in the Tax Code, and of course we need to begin by eliminating the marriage tax penalty. Is it right, is it fair that 21 million married working couples on average pay \$1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married, \$1,400 more than an identical couple living together outside a marriage? That is wrong, that our Tax Code punishes marriage.

The Marriage Tax Elimination Act has 230 cosponsors. Let us get it done this year. Let us simplify the Tax Code and eliminate the marriage tax penalty.

Of course the Republican agenda, a secure retirement and lower taxes also includes strengthening our local schools, and we want to strengthen our local schools by empowering our local school boards and our local teachers and our local parents to run their schools and giving them the flexibility, of course, to meet the needs of local communities, and that is an important shift because previously for 30 to 40 years all the power was moving to Washington. And I talk with local school administrators and school board members. They tell me maybe in Illinois 6 percent of our public schools' budget comes from Washington, but so does two-thirds of the paperwork and almost 100 percent of the mandates, micromanaging how our schools are run.

We want to let local schools run themselves and meet the needs of their local communities, and that is why we

want to pass the Ed Flex legislation. My hope, it will be on the President's desk fairly soon.

The other concern that local school board members also share with me is they say, as my colleagues know, "You've increased funding at the Federal level by 10 percent, even while you've been balancing the budget, increasing funding for education, but if you look at how those dollars have been spent, only 70 cents of every dollar actually reaches the classroom. Thirty cents is lost in the Washington bureaucracy."

Our goal is to ensure that more dollars get to the classroom, with a goal of 95 cents on the dollar reaching the classroom, and if we compare that to the current cost of delivering those funds to our local schools, that is a 25 percent funding increase above and beyond what they are currently receiving. We are providing \$22 billion in Federal funding for our local schools. It is just wrong that 30 cents on the dollar currently is lost in Washington.

Let us help our local schools. Let us lower the tax burden for the middle class. Let us secure retirement by strengthening Medicare and Social Security.

PUERTO RICANS—FIRST CLASS CITIZENS IN TIMES OF WAR, BUT SECOND CLASS CITIZENS IN TIMES OF PEACE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Mr. Speaker, as we return to our offices from our 2-week Easter recess, many important issues claim our immediate attention, not the least of which is the crisis in Kosovo. The matter is further complicated by our concerns about the three American soldiers being held prisoners by the Serbian government. Our prayers are with them and with their families at this critical period.

Throughout our Nation's history it has been demonstrated that our commitment to democratic values and securing peace and stability throughout the world has in many instances required the mobilization of our armed forces for the common good. During this century, in our dedication to peace and harmony amongst all people, we have opposed the forces of genocide and the inhumanity and cruelty of those who aim to ethnically cleanse a population, and this time it is not any different. The NATO allies stand firmly behind the aim to secure peace in the Yugoslavia region.

And now in this endeavor, just like we have in every other armed conflict throughout the century, the American citizens that reside in Puerto Rico stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their fellow American citizens from every